

THE AFRICANISTS CUT LOOSE

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Our special correspondent at the recent Africanist Conference.

WHILE White South Africa celebrated the Van Riebeeck weekend (4th—6th April) with volkspele, sport and sun-bathing, the Africanist movement, which had broken away from the African National Congress five months previously, held its inaugural conference in Johannesburg's Orlando Township.

Although the conference answered some important questions about the nature of the movement, a number of important problems remain unresolved. Perhaps its most significant event was the virtual repudiation of the movement's semi-articulate wildman, Josias Madzunya, who failed to gain a place on the executive of what now calls itself the Pan-Africanist Congress. Madzunya's hysterical pronouncements on "God's apartheid", (Africa for the Africans, Europe for the Europeans, Asia for the Asians), and his overt racialism had severely embarrassed his less bitter colleagues. Madzunya pledged himself to the movement he had helped to forge, unilaterally appointing himself its "watchdog", but it is certain that his star is at least temporarily very much on the wane. And with the shelving of Madzunya, the new leaders of the movement have moved to the fore from the shadows of theory. Passionate but restrained, young, fluent, sophisticated and well-educated, the first president, Robert Sobukwe, a lecturer at the University of the Witwatersrand, appears the embodiment of the reigning group in the movement.

Sobukwe delivered a weighty theoretical address to the conference at its opening session, but in the events leading up to his address clues to the less philosophical elements of Africanism had been revealed. First, an emotional and sometimes eccentric and exclusive Christianity. Three ministers graced the platform, and in prayers and addresses they referred to "the hooligans of Europe who killed our God and have never been convicted" and the legend of Christ's education in Africa, while cheers greeted the salute to "a black man, Simon of Arabia, who carried Jesus from the Cross". A rather sinister post-conference article in *The World* discusses the formation of an African national church which "would play a leading role in Africanist affairs, just as the Dutch Reformed Church did in Nationalist Party affairs". The movement's religious overtones

obviously tie up with its anti-Communism: "In our conferences and meetings there is no place for God . . . The younger generation is turning away from God . . . Because of ideologies many people have been led away from God," said the ministers.

Then there is the Africanists' claim to be more in tune with events throughout the rest of Africa than the A.N.C., manifested in their invitations to Dr. Banda and then Kenneth Kaunda to open their conference. The recipients of the invitations, being in "detention" at the time, could not be present, but the delegates were assured that they were there in spirit. Manifested, too, in the obviously sincere pleas that appeared in banner form and decorated the conference hall—"FREE BANDA, KENYATTA, KAUNDA," "IMPERIALISTS QUIT AFRICA," "AFRICA FOR AFRICANS, CAPE TO CAIRO, MOROCCO TO MADAGASCAR," and the triumphant reading of telegrams of good wishes from Dr. Nkrumah and Sékou Touré.

And then the conference took some time to shake off the feeling that the movement's disapproving elder brother, the A.N.C., was watching over its shoulder; and the turbulence of its break-away led to a feeling that the A.N.C. might attempt to disrupt their conference in return for the torrid time the Africanists had given the A.N.C. leadership last year. So when a group of singing delegates arrived late there was a scramble to man the defence barricades. The A.N.C. had proved its point.

It was only when Sobukwe began his long address that the Africanists appeared to attain an independent status. In elaborate political terminology he put forward the Africanist creed, with former treason-trialist, A. B. Ngcobo, interpreting into Zulu with great mental agility and gesticulatory acrobatics such expressions as "epoch-making achievements", "employ brinkmanship stunts", "the false doctrine of African exceptionalism."

The Africanist stand on contemporary international politics, said Sobukwe, was that of positive neutralism, borrowing the best from East and West; believing in political democracy as defined in the West, but favouring a more equitable distribution of wealth. He refuted racial myths, and cheers greeted his statement that no race was superior or inferior. However, "in South Africa we recognize the existence of national groups which are the result of geographic origin . . . The Europeans are a foreign group with exclusive control of political, military and economic power . . . True democracy can only be established when the African group comes into its own. Freedom of the Africans

can only be established when the African group comes into its own. Freedom of the Africans means freedom of every one, including Europeans in this country . . . People will live and be governed as individuals, and not as sectional groups. We reject apartheid and so-called multi-racialism. Multi-racialism is pandering to European arrogance, a method of safe-guarding White interests. The logical meaning of multi-racialism is proportional representation, and implies basic differences between national groups . . . and that the best course is to keep them apart in a form of democratic apartheid . . . We believe that everyone prepared to accept and give loyalty to Africa is an African."

The few important gaps in the theory of the Pan-Africanists had been provided in an earlier address by Mr. Zack Mothopeng, later to be elected to the organization's national executive. He said there could be no co-operation at this stage between the Africanists and Whites until the contradictions between the national groups had been resolved by the Africans. The Africanists, he said, wanted a non-racial democracy in which the African majority would rule. They did not believe in race, only in humanity.

Many have encountered, but few have commented on, the semantic revolution that accompanies the political revolution we are living through in Africa. Sometimes one feels sheer anarchy is loosed upon the world of language. The Africanists import the derogatory connotations of the term 'multi-racialism' from other parts of Africa, where British colonial practice has turned it into a swear-word, and use them against the Congress Movement. So to them the term means "racialism multiplied", while to White supremacists it means miscegenation rampant.

And herein perhaps lies the Africanist's greatest responsibility: to resist the temptation to manipulate language and encourage words like "African" to mean all things to all men. If they are sincere in their refutation of "race", then they should encourage Africans of Indian, English, Dutch and other extractions to join them, instead of vigorously discouraging them as they are doing now. It is disquieting that there are men in their ranks like Madzunya, who is on record as saying "no White man is sincere." Their present policy sounds dangerously like the statement of Blundell, who once justified the policy of a party he led in Kenya which preached multi-racialism, but was only open to Whites, by saying, "The Party may open its membership to

Africans and other non-Europeans when the multi-racial nation has been achieved." The Africanist line implies somehow first- and second-class Africans, with skin-colour being a factor in classification. In other words: "All who give their allegiance to Africa are Africans, but some Africans are more African than others." And their substitution of group generalizations—that are surely equally fallacious—for racial generalizations appears still to over-simplify the South African situation. There can be no short-cuts to democracy.

On political commentators, too, lies a heavy responsibility—that of deciding whether the new movement can become the purveyor of a "nationalism" unique in the world's history, a "continentalism" with an ideological foundation, or writing it off as the mere chauvinism into which it could, of course, degenerate. And if it should fall between the two and prove to be a virile inclusive black nationalism, it will be necessary for these commentators to come to terms with it and help others to do so. Fatal to this would be the confusion of majority nationalism with threatened, vicious, exclusive minority nationalism, a misunderstanding which would encourage black nationalism to take on the trappings of the Afrikaner variety.

The Pan-Africanist Congress is still in its formative stages, and has yet to become a serious force. Policy on means remains uncertain; if those Africanists who refuse co-operation on common grounds with other organizations have their way, then the movement seems bound to end up in negative, isolated theorizing, a nuisance to all except the supporters of the *status quo*. They plan a mass recruiting campaign, for at present their numbers are negligible. (Controversy raged at the conference as to the number of delegates present, and how many they represented, but it was largely a splitting of hairs).

The history of the A.N.C. reveals the constant failure of dissident and splinter groups to effectively challenge it, and its ability to tighten up in the face of criticism. Something that should be seriously considered by all of us in Congress is the elimination of the movement's internal colour-bar. This bold move, however difficult to implement, would be a mighty blow against racialism, and would also cut the ground from under the feet of the Africanists who claim that we subtly bolster up apartheid. The historic reasons for this structure have clearly disappeared.